

Story #493 (Tape #2, 1974)

Narrator: Hasan Kızıldaş, 80

Location: Narrator originally from Karaköse but tale told at Avcılar village, kaza of Ürgüp, Province of Nevşehir

Date: June 1974

A Potpourri of Folktale Plots and Religious Lore

was a ³shah once who was very fond of stories. [The narrator here, annoyed by noise of children in audience, scolded them for being restless.] Mahmut Shah was his name. He was greatly interested in travelers who came and went through his country. He used to listen to their tales, and he was an authority on curiosities of all kinds. *Story telling* His vezir Hasan said to him one day, "Your Majesty, you listen to these tales, and you pay out a great amount of money to their tellers, but our treasury is becoming impoverished. Also, there is much gossip about this in the town, and the people wonder why this great Shah spends so much time on such foolish fancy."

The Shah responded, "I shall give you twenty-four hours to find for me the story of Seyfilmülük.¹ If you find it, I shall give you a great amount of money--so much money and property--and I shall also give you such-and-such country."

¹Seyfilmülük is a long folk romance available in the oral tradition but also in numerous inexpensive paperback books sold at bazaars.

"Is that really so?" asked the vezir. He received the Shah's permission to leave. He then sent three men in three different directions--one to the east, one to the north, and one to the west. He instructed them to find and bring back the story of Seyfilmülük. I shall reward you by giving each of you members of my harem."

Each went in the direction assigned to him, and one of them finally reached Egypt. He saw there a man around whom many city people gathered. Each evening that man would tell a story to the people who came to him until, at a certain time, his audience would disperse and go home. After all of the other people had left, the traveler went to that man and said, "Selâmünaleyküm."

"Aleykünselâm."

"You are not originally from here--are you?"

"No, I am not. [There is something missing here.] There is a desert here in Egypt at the center of which there is a throne. A traveler comes there and tells tales while all of us listen to him. When the tale ends, we all arise and leave. That is where you should go to listen to tales."

The vezir's man went to this place, looked about, and saw a chair there. A traveler came along, sat on that throne, and commenced to narrate while everyone else listened. When the time came and all others had left, the [vezir's] man went up to this traveler and said, "Selâmünaleyküm."

"Aleykümselâm."

"If you know the story of Seyfilmülük, I shall give you anything you want for it."

The traveler thought deeply, and then he said, "Oh, son, I am the only one who knows that tale, and you are the only one who has asked me to tell it. I am now wondering whether or not I should tell it. If I do not, the story will go to the grave with me. I have it written down, and I shall give it to you." The man went with the story-teller and spent the night at his home. In the morning he tried to give him money for the story, but he refused to accept it. "But do not ever read this story while sitting on the roadside. And do not ever read it while sitting by women, especially harem women."

The man took the story and returned with it to Mahmut Shah. The Shah called a meeting of his council and had the story read aloud. Mahmut Shah enjoyed the story very much, for it was a very valuable story. It was a story that ~~had~~ to do with the Prophet Solomon. He had this story written in golden letters and he sent it to his treasury where it was kept. (This is a very long story and here I have hardly started it.

Ahmet Uysal: Did you hear this tale at Karaköse?

Narrator: Karaköse and here too. I had a book of such stories.

Ahmet Uysal: Oh, did you read it in a book?

Narrator: Yes, Seyfilmülük is in a book.

Ahmet Uysal: I want tales not in books. Was the first tale from a book?

Narrator: No, that one was not in a book

Ahmet Uysal: What other tales do you know?

Narrator: I know Yedi alim hikayesi [The Story of Seven Wise Men].

Ahmet Uysal: Can you give the titles of tales that you know?

Narrator: "Hasan Padishah"--who had a brother called Kamil Pehlivan [Wrestler]. This is also a good tale. I also know a tale called "Tarçın" [Cinnamon] about a child who was found and then sold. He was also a big wrestler, and he found the most beautiful woman in the world. Then there is the story called "The Three Brothers."²

There were once three brothers^{+3 son} to whom their father said, before he died, "Boys, do not climb a certain mountain or you will be burned." After he had died, his oldest son became restless and decided to climb the mountain. There he met an Arab who slapped him and tied him up. The middle brother also climbed the mountain, and he was also tied up. Then the youngest son mounted his horse and rode to the mountain. There he saw the huge Arab with one lip on the ground *Arab with enormous teeth*

²These stories to which the old man refers are all but impossible to identify. Countless tales include three brothers, the youngest of whom is the most capable and ultimately the most successful.

and the other lip in the sky. "O son of man," said the Arab, you also come to the mountain?"

"Yes, I did, you dirty Arab."

"Look to your safety, then," said the Arab, throwing his mace at him. The young man blocked this blow with his shield, and, in turn, hit the Arab so hard with his club that he was knocked to the ground. The young man, with his dagger drawn, jumped on his chest. At this point, the Arab drew the veil from his face, and the young man saw a girl as beautiful as the fourteenth of the moon.⁴ (This is a long tale.)

Begin
4th 9 *now*

Narrator: I know another good tale--it is a very long one--about the three-year-old son of a padishah who was stolen by giants and carried away to the Kaf Mountain.⁵ It is a long tale of adventure

Ahmet Uysal: Are there songs in that tale?

Narrator: No, no songs.

³This is the traditional feature of the Arab as the genie who comes to answer the commands of the one who controls the magic object to which he is subject.

⁴Traditional praise for beautiful women in Turkey. The moon is an object of great beauty, and the most beautiful when full--the 14th day of a 28-day moon cycle. Plumpness is valued in women, and the most attractive woman is one as rotund as is the moon on its fourteenth day.

⁵The Kaf Mountains are imaginary, thought to form the rim of the world, around the edge of the Circumambient Ocean.

Ahmet Uysal: Does it contain heroism?

Narrator: Yes, much. Another tale I know is "Zagaoghlu Rustem."⁶

Ahmet Uysal: Are there others?

Narrator: "Karaman."

Ahmet Uysal: Are there herioc songs in your area?

Narrator: "Memi alan," a Kurdish tale--very long. --I lived for twenty years near Tarsus, a place of prophets

Ahmet Uysal: What prophets?

Narrator: Daniel and Lokman,⁷ the Seven Sleepers, Shiit, the twentieth son of Adam, who became a prophet after Adam. Fifty books were revealed to him while only ten books were revealed to the Prophet Adam.

Ahmet Uysal: And to Lokman?

Narrator: No books were revealed to Lokman, who was the son of Daniel of Tarsus. Their tombs are at Tarsus. Lokman and Shiit were buried in the Ulu Cami [Great Mosque] at Tarsus. Were you ever in Tarsus?

Ahmet Uysal: Yes.

Narrator: Did you see these things?

⁷ Lokman was a legendary figure mentioned in the Koran. Originally a sage and healer, he became in popular legend a trickster, a lover, and other figures. See his entry in Encyclopaedia of Islam. Most of the narrator's comments about Biblical and Koranic figures are his own invention or misrepresentation. So too are his statements about the number of books of revelation attributed to different prophets.

Ahmet Uysal: No. No one told me of their being

Narrator: Ah, you would never visit such places. Also, the son of the Caliph of Baghdad is buried at Tarsus.

Ahmet Uysal: There should be the cave of the Seven Sleepers near Tarsus, then?

Narrator: In the mountain there. I went there once and spent a night there. They escaped there from the cruelty of a king.

Ahmet Uysal: Was it Takyonos?⁸

Narrator: Yes.

Ahmet Uysal: What stories do you know about Daniel and Shiit?

Narrator: A story about Lokman.

Lokman knew when a man would die. One day Daniel said to his wife, "Watch this boy!" As a child Lokman used to go to the mountain with his donkey and bring wood back to the town where he sold it. One day when they were going up to the forest, it started to rain, and the wife of Daniel [and Lokman] took shelter in a cave. She saw a marble slab in the center of the cave and wondered what it

⁸Takyonos is an unidentified person who figures importantly in Turkish treasure lore. Takyonos gold is the treasure of some Byzantine Roman emperor, though there was no emperor named Takyonos. He is often thought to be associated with the emperor involved in The Seven Sleepers tale, but this is dubious, for the emperor at the time The Seven Sleepers entered the cave was Decius, and the emperor at the time they emerged was Theodosius, neither name sounding very much like Takyonos.

was doing there. She told others of this. Soon they cut a tree used it as a lever, moved the stone, and then later covered it up

Ahmet Uysal: How long did you say you had lived at Tarsus?

Narrator: Twenty years.

Ahmet Uysal: And how many books did you say had been sent by God?

Narrator: One hundred and four altogether.

Ahmet Uysal: And how many were revealed to each prophet?

Narrator: Ten were revealed to Adam. Fifty were revealed to Shiit. Thirty to Idris, son of Shiit. Ten to Abraham. Then the Tevrat [Old Testament] was revealed to Moses. It was originally one camel load. Zebur [The Psalms] was revealed to David. He was the father of Solomon. Incil [New Testament] was revealed to Hazretti [Blessed] Jesus, and the Holy Koran to our Mohammed. It [Koran] consisted of 6,666 verses in 114 chapters. *! MAB!*

Ahmet Uysal: Are all of these books part of the one hundred and four revealed?

Narrator: Yes. Four are major books; part of the one hundred are lesser books. When the Koran was revealed all of the others were invalidated. Many prophets came and went.

Ahmet Uysal: Thirty-three?

Narrator: No--twenty-eight. According to the Koran, twenty-eight.

According to another claim, 124,000. Another claim says that 224,000 prophets came and went. Only Almighty God knows the true number. According to one claim, Nuh [Noah] lived 950 years, but a different opinion says 935 years. Noah lived longer. There was much trouble in the household of Noah, and so the flood was sent down upon them by God. There were many disasters and wars, and they all perished. There were only forty males and forty females left, and he [Noah] loaded them on a ship, and he took a pair of each kind of animal, and even Iblis [Satan] was saved in that disaster.⁹

Ahmet Uysal: Did that ship land on Mt. Ararat?

Narrator: No, on Supandagh.¹⁰

⁹ There are various accounts about how the devil came aboard the Ark. They are not limited to accounts in the Turkish oral tradition.

¹⁰ Supandagh is a mountain on the northwest shore of Lake Van, in the same region as Ararat.